

Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black



Eating Healthy for Increased Energy and Vitality

Strategies for a Plant-Forward Life



**Thank you for subscribing to Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black!
Here's your free guide to help you move away from old dietary habits and embrace a healthy plant-forward lifestyle.**

Any change can be difficult, but changing the way we eat is sometimes the most challenging of all. Food is central to our cultural identity and forms the core of many of our family traditions.

Often, people know they need to change their diet, but don't know where to start. They may be afraid that they will miss their old favorites or be isolated from friends and family. Maybe they're intimidated by new and unusual ingredients or don't feel confident in their cooking skills.

Whether you're working to improve your own health, or are looking for strategies to give your kids the best chance at a long life free of the chronic diseases plaguing many adults, you've come to the right place. Below, you will find 20 tried and true strategies to help you set healthy eating goals and stick to them without feeling starved or overwhelmed.





1

Identify your 'why'. Make a list of all the reasons that you want to make a change to your diet. Is it because of your health or the health of a family member? Are you concerned about the environment or animal welfare? Maybe it's a little of all of the above. Write a detailed mission statement.

2

Determine your specific dietary goals. Do you want to reduce meat intake by a certain amount or go all the way to vegan? Maybe you want to follow one of the evidence-based plant-predominant diets like the Mediterranean Diet or the M.I.N.D. diet. Focus on your goals and what's important to you.

3

Keep a diary. Write down your goals and inventory any health symptoms you have such as back pain, reflux, fatigue, bloating, constipation, or headaches. Write down your blood pressure or your lab results like cholesterol and HbA1c from a recent checkup. Track your weight if that is one of your goals. Periodically reassess your symptoms and record new measurements as you continue to make changes.

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Know your personality type: do you do better with small gradual changes, or are you a 'go big or go home' kind of person? Set realistic **S.M.A.R.T.** goals accordingly.

- **Specific** – avoid vague goals like “eat healthier” and instead be very specific about the changes you plan to make.
- **Measurable** – set goals that you can track like, “eat 1 extra serving of vegetables every day”.
- **Achievable** – make goals just hard enough to be challenging, but not so hard that there's no way you'll stick to them. You can always raise the bar later.
- **Relevant** – set goals that align with your 'why'.
- **Timebound** – set a deadline that gives yourself a reasonable amount of time to reach your goal and then measure your progress as you go.

An example of a S.M.A.R.T. goal for someone who wants to make gradual changes to their diet to bring down their cholesterol is, “I will replace breakfast sausage with steel cut oats for breakfast 2 days out of the week and then gradually increase it by 1 extra day per week for 5 more weeks until I have completely switched out sausage for oats.”

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Talk to your friends and family and get them on your team. If possible, get them to join you in making healthy changes. Find a partner, champion, or group of like-minded people who share your vision. This could be people at your local gym, co-workers, or an online community. By surrounding yourself with people who already embody the lifestyle you aspire to live, you are more likely to succeed at your goals.



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Keep it positive. Focus on what you are adding instead of what you're taking away. There's a whole world of delicious, healthy food out there waiting for you to discover it. Celebrate your progress and don't worry about times you slipped back into your old habits. Guilt and shame never helped anyone achieve their goals. Don't be afraid of failure. Write down how you could have done things differently and then start fresh the next day.

7

Make a plan. Preparation is the #1 tip for success regardless of what you're doing! Plan your weekly menu and make a grocery list. If possible, get the family involved in this process.

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Consider doing meal prep on the weekend so that you don't have to think about what you're going to eat when you're tired after a busy workday. Know your schedule in advance so you know when you have time to cook and when you need ready-made options. Have a contingency plan for when unexpected obstacles arise.

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Keep it simple. Don't try to start with elaborate recipes that require a long list of ingredients that you're unfamiliar with and will cost a lot of money. You can start just by making a smaller portion of meat and adding an extra plant-based side. For example, make a smaller portion of chicken and add a side of beans, salad, or vegetables to your meal. Add a fruit salad for dessert. You will not only reap the health benefits, but you may also save on your grocery bill.

10

Clean out the fridge, freezer, and pantry. Throw out things you have made a commitment to remove from your diet. Non-perishable items can be donated to the local food bank. Stock the pantry and freezer with staples like beans, lentils, and frozen vegetables that are easy to grab and use.

11

Gradually build your spice rack. Herbs and spices are a great way to add flavor to your dishes. As a bonus, spices like garlic, turmeric, ginger, and cinnamon have powerful anti-inflammatory benefits.

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Start small: pick one day or even just one meal to make plant-based and build on that. Commit to Meatless Mondays or decide to bring a vegetarian lunch to work on weekdays. Once you're used to the new routine, add in another meat-free day or meal.

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Pick one ultra-processed snack to replace with a whole food alternative. Have fruit instead of candy or nuts instead of chips. You can even try roasting canned chickpeas with a little olive oil and your favorite spice blend for a protein-packed crunchy snack.



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Another method is to pick an animal product that you want to eliminate and build on that. For example, start with cutting out pork, then red meat, then eggs, chicken, dairy, and lastly, fish. If you have specific health issues, focus on removing the most problematic foods first.

15

Try to add new colors to your menu. The colorful pigments in the skin of fresh fruits and vegetables are the very molecules that are responsible for many of the health benefits of plant-based foods. Eat a rainbow of colorful food every day.

16

Start with one conventional recipe you like and look for plant-based subs for the animal-based ingredients. For example, switch out ground beef in tacos for beans or use silken tofu instead of ricotta in lasagna. See if you can find a similar plant-based recipe on the internet. Gradually replace your favorite recipes with healthier plant-forward alternatives.

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Set yourself up for success by avoiding or removing the cues that trigger your old habits. Put the unhealthy snacks up high and out of sight or don't bring them into the house at all. Put the fruit out on the counter where you can see it instead. If you regularly drive through a fast-food chain on your way to work, take a different route. If you have to go out of your way, you are less likely to eat the less healthy options. Even small changes to your routine or environment can make a big difference.

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If you find yourself feeling hungry soon after eating a plant-based meal, make sure you have added in enough protein and fat. Healthy sources like walnuts or other nuts, avocado slices, and even olives will make your meals more satisfying. This also helps to even out your blood sugar curve and helps you feel fuller longer. Make sure to eat enough calories; if you're hungry, you will be more likely to succumb to cravings that don't align with your goals.

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Practice mindful eating. Take time to savor the flavor of every bite. Turn off your TV and put down your phone. No matter where your meal falls on the health scale, pay attention to how you feel during and after the meal. Are you pleasantly satisfied or overly full? Do you feel sluggish and weighed down? Are you ready for a nap an hour later? Or, do you feel energized? Take notes and track your body's response to the changes you're making. Periodically compare how you feel now to your original symptom list to monitor how things have changed.



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Find a couple good vegetarian food bloggers and subscribe to their site so you get regular updates when they release a new recipe. Many food blogs include helpful videos demonstrating cooking techniques. This is a great way to find inspiration for either adapting your old recipes or exploring new ones. For a list of my favorite vegetarian and vegan food blogs, go to the [resources page](#) on the Eat Your Greens website.

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Bonus tip: Make it fun! Gamify it by seeing who can find the weirdest new vegetable or fruit at the market, or who can eat the highest number of different plant-based foods in one week. Let the kids find fun new recipes online to try and let them assist with the shopping and cooking in an age-appropriate manner. Have a family cook off to see who makes the best vegetarian chili or stir-fry. Friendly competition is a great way to achieve your goals and have fun at the same time.

Remember, it's not what you eat at any one given meal but what you do on a day-to-day basis that determines your overall health. Even small changes can yield big results in the long run. Be flexible and don't beat yourself up for the occasional mishap. Continue to participate in the cultural and family traditions that bring meaning to your life. If you can make adjustments that help you stick with your nutrition goals, go ahead and do so. If not, then don't worry about it. Social connection is equally important for your long-term health.

Thanks again for subscribing and Don't Forget to Eat Your Greens!



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